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ABSTRACT

To prepare for dissemination of data from the next administration of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), scheduled to occur in school year 1999-2000, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) sponsored a review and survey of the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of SASS publications for key customers. The first phase of the study profiled different types of publications prepared by the SASS program. The second project phase explored key customer perceptions about the usefulness and accessibility of SASS publications, and the third phase built on information from the first two phases to develop an understanding of how customers use two primary SASS publications, "Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile 1993-94" and "SASS by State 1993-94." Since 1994, the NCES has produced 133 documents related to the SASS. Responses were collected from 30 representatives of state education agencies and 19 individuals associated with education associations, universities, and educational research organizations. Respondents' comments indicated that the content of SASS publications is generally appropriate to their needs. They did make some suggestions for improving the usefulness of the publications. Concerns were expressed about the timeliness and periodicity of SASS data publications. An appendix contains printing and distribution information about 20 recent SASS publications. (SLD)

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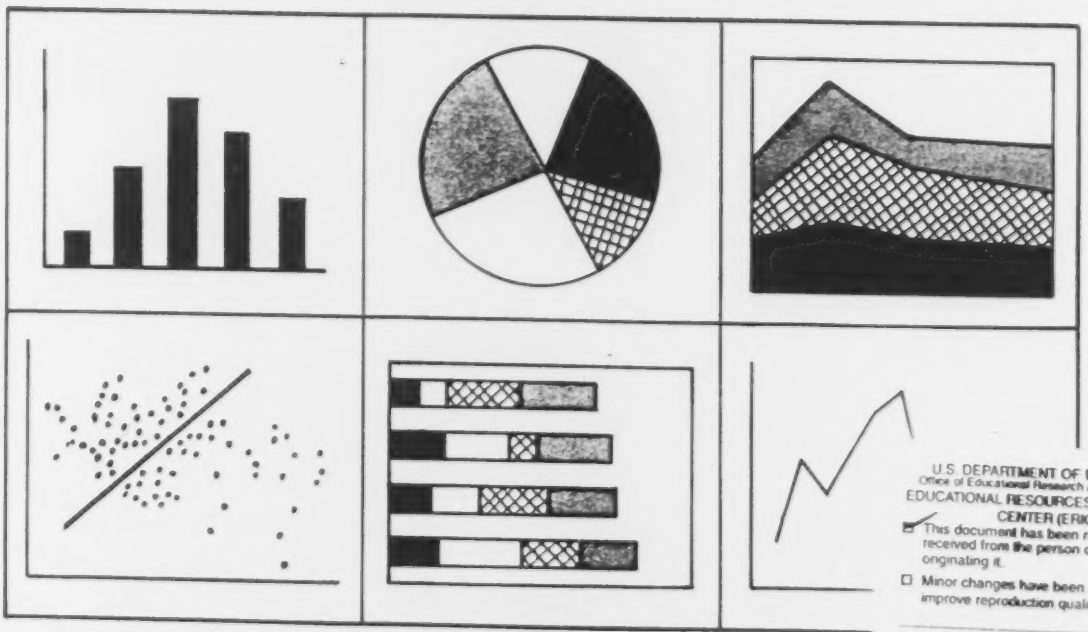
Working Paper Series

What Users Say About

Schools and Staffing Survey Publications

Working Paper No. 1999-10 May 1999



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What Users Say About

Schools and Staffing Survey Publications

Working Paper No. 1999-10 May 1999

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May 1999

Foreword

In addition to official NCES publications, NCES staff and individuals commissioned by NCES produce preliminary research reports that include analyses of survey results, and presentations of technical, methodological, and statistical evaluation issues.

The ***Working Paper Series*** was initiated to promote the sharing of the valuable work experience and knowledge reflected in these preliminary reports. These reports are viewed as works in progress, and have not undergone a rigorous review for consistency with NCES Statistical Standards prior to inclusion in the Working Paper Series.

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What Users Say About

Schools and Staffing Survey Publications

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May 1999

Abstract

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) launched the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) in the 1987-88 school year. To prepare for the dissemination of data from the next administration of SASS, scheduled to occur in school year 1999-2000, NCES asked Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to undertake a review and survey of the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of SASS publications for key customers.

This publications review took place in three phases. The first phase profiled different types of publications prepared by the SASS program. The second phase of this project explored key customer perceptions about the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of SASS publications. The third phase of the publications review built on the information collected in the first and second phases to develop an understanding of how customers use two primary SASS publications, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile 1993-94* and *SASS by State 1993-94*.

Since 1994, NCES has produced 133 documents pertaining to the Schools and Staffing Survey. These publications are of several types—descriptive reports, analytic reports, technical reports, issue briefs, and working papers. Each type of publication has its own purpose and is directed to its own audience. Accordingly, each publication reports on its subject matter with an appropriate amount of information and level of technicality. State education agency representatives and other key customers who use SASS publications regard them highly. Most frequently, they use these publications to:

- Inform decision making
- Supply data to state officials, the legislature, and media
- Respond to other requests for data
- Compare their state data with data from other states
- Use as a resource in their own research

Respondents' comments indicate the content of these publications is generally appropriate to their needs. When asked to suggest improvements that would make SASS publications even more appropriate to their needs, they suggested:

- Making the original survey instruments available in an appendix or companion document and referring the findings in SASS publications to the instruments so users can see the original question

- Separating out middle school data from elementary and secondary data
- Producing summary documents with trend data
- Providing more detailed state information
- Allowing states to pay for the collection of additional data and oversampling

State education agency representatives and other key customers also expressed interest in obtaining more information on the following topics:

- Professional development
- Teachers' routes to the classroom
- Student assessment
- Standards
- Accountability systems
- School violence
- Salary comparisons
- Administrators' backgrounds and positions
- Student enrollments and teacher supply and demand projections
- Dropout rates

Customers were overwhelmingly positive about the format of SASS publications. The text and the tables, they indicated, were easy to understand and well laid out. Most customers turn to the tables far more often than they do the text. Nonetheless, they want NCES to continue presenting the data in both formats to help those individuals who "are not numbers people" and because they often find the highlights and summaries useful in picking out key points.

Customers' suggestions for improving the usability of SASS publications centered on:

- Providing more national breakdowns
- Providing more tables with private school indicator breakdowns
- Making adjustments in the placement of some of the tables

- Explaining definitions in more detail, coordinating definitions across all NCES surveys, and creating a key word cross-referencing system across all NCES publications
- Providing more informative table of contents information
- Highlighting key descriptors in the SASS charts to simplify locating data
- Including more totals and subtotals in tables
- Increasing reproducibility of tables, graphs, and maps

If there was an issue of major concern, it was the timeliness and periodicity of SASS data publications. Respondents suggested a number of ways that NCES could speed up the dissemination of SASS data, including:

- Publishing "first glance" estimates
- Prioritizing the most useful data and publishing that first
- Publishing data tables first, then producing the full document
- Expediting data collection by using technology
- Releasing data electronically through NCES' home page
- Conducting interim surveys on single topics, i.e., weapons/violence in schools

Respondents made it clear that they did not want NCES to sacrifice the high quality customers had come to expect of SASS data and data presentation for the sake of getting the results out sooner.

Most state education agency representatives and other key customers interviewed indicated they received SASS publications in the mail and so they assumed they were on a SASS mailing list. Many respondents also picked up SASS publications at meetings they attended.

Respondents' comments suggested that NCES could significantly increase the number of SASS users by stepping up its advertising of SASS. While state education agency representatives and other key customers praised their access to SASS publications when they knew about them, they also emphasized that much of the data go unused because they and other people do not know the data are there. This indicates that additional state education agency personnel may very well serve as a ready audience should NCES choose to expand its marketing strategy for SASS publications.

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Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) first launched the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) in the 1987-88 school year. Since then, NCES has used information collected from SASS to produce over 200 data products that inform educators, policymakers, researchers, and other individuals about the characteristics and conditions of America's public and private schools, school districts, teachers, and administrators. The data reported in these products were collected by mail with telephone follow-up of non-respondents in three separate administrations of SASS, first during the 1987-88 school year and again during the 1990-91 and the 1993-94 school years.

To prepare for the dissemination of data from the next administration of SASS, scheduled to occur in school year 1999-2000, NCES asked Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to undertake a review and survey of the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of SASS publications for key customers. All SASS publications, with the exception of working papers, go through an extensive adjudication process before they are published. This adjudication process is designed to assure the technical soundness of SASS publications. It involves a review of the publication at several levels within NCES, including the SASS program director and NCES' chief statistician, and by content or methodology experts within and outside the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). However, no comparable process exists to routinely assess the soundness of the presentation and dissemination of SASS publications--adjudicated and non-adjudicated, individually and collectively--and the extent to which these publications adequately meet customer needs. This review of SASS publications begins to fill that void. Its goal is to develop an understanding of the extent to which users of SASS data (1) think the data meet their specific information needs (appropriateness of the data collected and reported), (2) find the data presentations understandable (usability), and (3) think the data are easily obtainable in print form (accessibility).

This publications review took place in three phases. The first phase profiled different types of publications prepared by the SASS program. It described the breadth of various types of publications, their roles and goals, the audience segments for whom they are intended, their distribution, and the processes by which NCES staff make decisions about them.

The second phase of this project explored key customer perceptions about the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of SASS publications. PSA collected information from a targeted set of individuals who are known to have some experience using SASS publications. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, it surveyed representatives from state education agencies and other key customers about their use of SASS data products and their opinion of the products' appropriateness, usability, and accessibility.

The third phase of the publications review built on the information collected in the first and second phases to develop an understanding of how customers use two primary SASS publications, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile 1993-94* and *SASS by State 1993-94*. PSA conducted focus group discussions with select customers to collect information on ways the publications might be more appropriate, usable, and accessible to customers—in short, how to increase the use of SASS data among primary constituent groups.

SASS data products take many forms. In addition to print products, there are on-line publications, CD-ROMs, and data tapes. This publications review and survey encompasses SASS print products only. While a more comprehensive and long-range review would address all forms of SASS data presentation, especially online availability and usability of manipulable data and reports, that is beyond the purpose of the present review and survey. This publications review concentrates only on the different types of print publications that report data from SASS.

Phase One
A Review of SASS Publications

NCES reports data from the Schools and Staffing Survey in several types of print publications that fall into two categories. One category of publication examines data that pertain directly to schools and their staffs. Publications in this category provide statistical data on teachers, principals, schools, and school districts, and explore issues such as teacher attrition, teacher and principal qualifications, professional development, class size, and sources of new teachers. This category contains three types of SASS data products: descriptive reports, analytic reports, and issue briefs.

The second category of publication addresses data issues that interest professionals in the fields of survey research and research methodology. Publications in this category, for example, describe the survey design, compare the characteristics of teachers who responded to the SASS questionnaire and teachers who did not respond, or examine the quality of the data. SASS technical reports are the major type of publication in this category.

Another type of publication, working papers, can fall into either category, depending upon the topic.

This section of the publications review focuses on these five types of publications developed by the Schools and Staffing Program: descriptive reports, analytic reports, technical reports, issue briefs, and working papers. It profiles each type of publication by addressing the following questions:

1. What is the goal of each publication type?
2. For whom is each publication type intended?
3. What assumptions do SASS program staff make about their audiences? What is the range of data sophistication among users? What data needs do they have?
4. What topics have these publications featured over the past three SASS cycles? How were these topics chosen? By whom?
5. What topics are planned for future issues? How were these topics chosen? By whom?
6. What type of content does the publication carry? Is it technical? Is it general?
7. What is the depth of content in the publication?
8. What is the format? Number of pages? Balance of text vs. tables? Other visuals? How does the format facilitate the message?

9. How does the product relate to other SASS publications?

10. How is the product marketed/disseminated? To whom?

11. What mechanisms exist to obtain customer feedback?

12. What do SASS program staff know about how well each product is meeting customer expectations and/or customer needs?

Information on these questions comes from a number of sources, including:

- A review of 18 select publications that report SASS data
- Interviews with SASS program staff who prepare and disseminate SASS publications
- A review of 20 SASS product destination reports prepared by OERI
- Available sales information on those 20 publications supplied to OERI by the Government Printing Office (GPO)

SASS Publication Profiles

Between 1991 and March 1999, the SASS team produced 133 publications. Exhibit 1 shows that well over a third (58) were working papers. Descriptive reports were the next most frequent type of publication (31), followed by 25 issue briefs, 9 analytic reports, and 10 technical reports.

Teachers were by far the most frequent topic, with 43 publications providing data on either the characteristics of teachers or the conditions in which teachers work. SASS survey methodology was the next most frequent subject, with 31 publications on this topic. Another 15 publications were on the topic of private schools, and 12 reported data on both public and private schools. Publications on the remaining topics appeared as follows: multiple topics in education (11), principals (7), special populations (6), public schools (5), and school districts (3).

Exhibit 1
Number of SASS Products Published by Topic and Type of Publication: 1991 - March 1999

Topic	Descriptive Reports	Analytic Reports	Technical Reports	Issue Briefs	Working Papers	Total
School Districts	2				1	3
Public Schools				3	2	5
Private Schools	7			1	7	15
Public and Private Schools	2	2		4	4	12
Principals	1			5	1	7
Teachers	10	6	1	10	16	43
Special Populations	4			2		6
SASS General	5	1			5	11
SASS Technical Methodology			9		22	31
Total	**31**	**9**	**10**	**25**	**58**	**133**

Exhibit reads: School districts were the topic of two SASS descriptive reports and one SASS working paper, for a total of three SASS publications on that topic between 1991 and March 1999.

PSA reviewers also examined OERI product dissemination reports for 20 SASS publications. These publications are listed in the Appendix, along with information about their printing and distribution. The number of copies NCES printed of these 20 publications ranged from a little over 1,000 for technical reports to over 7,000 for a descriptive profile of U.S. school districts. The number of copies mailed to individuals in organizations on OERI's mailing list ranged from 348 to 3,046. Major audiences for most reports were staff and members of elementary and secondary education organizations and personnel in state education agencies. Other copies were distributed by the National Education Data Resource Center (NEDRC), authors of the reports, and ED Pubs--the Department of Education's publications distribution center.

SASS Descriptive Reports

Descriptive reports present SASS data without interpretation or analysis. They may be either broad or focused. Broad descriptive reports address many topics within a subject. The SASS statistical profiles of school districts and principals are examples of broad descriptive reports. A single report on principals could discuss demographics, salary, benefits, education, experience, principals' perceptions of school problems, and other topics. Focused descriptive reports, on the other hand, report on one topic in more depth, such as teachers' job satisfaction or the amount of time teachers spend teaching particular subjects. The data in both types of descriptive reports can be drawn from a single questionnaire or from synthesis of descriptive data from several questionnaires.

SASS program staff produce descriptive reports for customers who need information about a specific topic. This audience is more interested in what they can learn about a topic from the data that SASS generates than the methods and procedures of data collection. Consequently, the aim is to provide these individuals with information in easily accessible ways. To help customers find the information they are looking for as quickly as possible, descriptive reports place all technical notes, references, tables of standard errors, and other supplementary information in the back of the report.

NCES currently disseminates 31 descriptive reports on SASS data. The scope and topics of these reports are generally selected according to their relevance to current issues in education and in consultation with others in ED, members of the education research community, and representatives from public and private schools. Then, SASS program staff couple current issues with their experience and familiarity with the data to derive the report's content and organization.

Data on teachers are the most frequent topic of these reports, with 10 reports focusing on teacher characteristics and various aspects of teaching. The next most frequent topic is data on private schools. While no descriptive reports address public schools only (one such report is forthcoming), public school data appear in reports that describe both public and private schools and make up a large portion of those publications that present data on all SASS topics--teachers, administrators, schools, and school districts.

Much of the data collected and reported in SASS descriptive reports bear on policy issues. For example, data collected on the race or ethnicity of students and teachers could contribute to policy discussions about the proportion of minority teachers to minority students in public schools. A policymaker could link the descriptive data to important policy questions or to trends that may be important for policymakers as they consider future policy directions.

NCES follows a standard procedure to disseminate descriptive reports on SASS data. The project director meets with the SASS program director and NCES' publications staff, and consults with other SASS program staff to select categories of individuals on OERI's mailing list to receive an announcement of the publication's availability. The announcement briefly describes the report and provides ordering information. OERI's mailing list includes nearly 150 education interest groups such as elementary and secondary education associations; other associations, higher education institutions, and researchers; state education agencies; libraries and library organizations; governors and their education aides; state legislators and their aides; business, media, and others.

The number of announcements sent out varies by publication and averages 5,000 to 10,000 per publication. For the sample of descriptive reports examined for this survey, the number of announcements mailed from OERI ranged from a low of 2,318 to a high of 93,790[1]. Primary recipients of announcements of descriptive reports were elementary and secondary education associations, governors' offices, state education agencies, state directors of legislative research, libraries, business and industry trade groups, and the media. Recipients are directed to order the publication from the GPO. Potential readers who contact the SASS team directly for copies obtain them free of charge. NEDRC and ED Pubs also distribute copies free of charge, although the announcement does not indicate this. In addition, readers can download the documents from NCES' Web page or request copies, at cost, from ERIC.

At the same time, some categories of individuals are selected to receive the full report. These recipients are individuals in organizations known to have a high interest in the topic of a particular report. In the 20 OERI product dissemination reports reviewed, the number of descriptive reports sent to individuals on OERI's mailing list ranged from 750 to 3,046. Primary audiences to receive the publications were members of select elementary and secondary education associations, ED staff, individuals who are on the SASS mailing list, and state education agency personnel.

SASS program staff solicit no formal reader feedback on descriptive reports, although it does get occasional feedback from informal discussions with colleagues in the field. According to staff interviewed for this review, customers usually initiate these discussions rather than staff members.

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[1] This unusually high number of announcements is because NCES distributed one publication, *Public and Private School Principals in the U.S.: A Statistical Profile, 1987-88 to 1993-94,* to all of the public elementary and secondary schools in the nation, as well as to other select audiences. The next highest number of announcements sent out for the publications in this sample was 22,600.

SASS Analytic Reports

SASS analytic reports address public policy concerns. They are for use by federal and state legislators, congressional staff, state education agency staff, and others who deal with issues such as teacher qualifications, teacher job satisfaction, and organizational qualities of public and private secondary schools.

The purpose of these reports is to convey information about specific topics or to identify trends in topic areas. The information is usually reported in depth and with a significant amount of detail and discussion. Like all publications that report SASS data, analytic reports compare data and test for statistical significance. Analytic reports also generally contain multiple regression models that allow them to test hypotheses.

Topics for SASS analytic reports emerge from broad questions raised by the data. Because these questions cover a great deal of ground in a single area, responses often point to issues that need more in-depth exploration or examination. Frequently, topics are chosen because they are being debated in the policy arena. Staff interest plays a role in the selection of these topics. An example is a recent report of an empirical analysis of SASS data on salary variations between public and private school teachers according to personal and job characteristics such as gender, racial and ethnic background, teaching level, teaching qualifications, and work environments. The report statistically isolated the impact of each variable that, according to the literature, affects teacher salaries while controlling for others to form their conclusions and provide implications for policy.

NCES is currently disseminating 10 analytic reports. Seven of these reports focus on teachers, two on public and private schools, and one covers a range of topics found in SASS. Analytic reports follow a standard format. The front includes contents, a list of tables, acknowledgments, and an executive summary. The body of the report is a mix of text and tables. References, technical notes, tables of standard errors, and other statistical data appear in the back of the document for those readers who are interested in the technical underpinnings of the analysis.

The project director and the SASS team leader, in conjunction with OERI's publications staff, make decisions about the distribution of analytic reports. The project director, working with OERI's publications' staff, prepares an announcement that briefly describes the report, and the announcement with an order form is sent to categories of individuals and organizations on NCES's mailing list. For each of the four analytic reports studied in this publications review, between 4,375 and 5,694 announcements were mailed. Some audiences also received the full publication. Recipients included staff in elementary and secondary education associations, state education agencies, and ED as well as

individuals on the SASS mailing list and the media. For the four analytic reports whose distribution was examined for this survey, mailings of the full publication ranged from 348 to 2,692.

The announcement also appears on NCES' web site. The reports are available for purchase through GPO. Copies may also be obtained free of charge by telephoning a member of the SASS program staff, NEDRC, or ED Pubs.

As with other SASS publications, no formal mechanism exists to obtain feedback on how well SASS analytic reports meet customer needs.

SASS Technical Reports

SASS technical reports are specialized publications that document survey methodology, sampling, response or nonresponse patterns, and other operations that affect the *quality* of data. The purpose of these publications is to document current knowledge, recommend changes in the future development of SASS, and make a professional contribution to the larger knowledge base on survey research.

The documentation that appears in SASS technical reports is part of a larger federal effort to improve the information available on survey procedures and methodology, and to achieve broad consistency across the federal government's data collection programs.

Since 1991, NCES has published 10 technical reports on a range of methodological issues pertaining to SASS. For example, one technical report explores the extent of bias in estimates resulting when sampling units such as school districts, schools, administrators, or teachers do not respond to the survey. The same study also looks at the characteristics of respondents and nonrespondents for the same subgroups. Another technical report describes SASS sampling and estimation procedures.

The technical publications reviewed for this study varied from 150 to 250 pages and consisted of a mix of text, figures, and charts. These publications are primarily for an audience of sophisticated data users who would most likely use the information described in conjunction with their own statistical and survey research. This audience is smaller than that for other SASS publications, largely because of the specialized nature of the content.

SASS staff estimate that roughly 200 copies get distributed outside ED, primarily to researchers who design and conduct surveys that are similar to SASS. As with other publications on SASS data,

decisions about the number of copies that should be printed and to whom these reports should be sent are made at a dissemination meeting involving the project officer, the SASS program director, the editor, and NCES' director of publications. At that same meeting, the group decides what categories of individuals should receive an announcement that the publication is available for purchase.

An examination of the dissemination of four SASS technical reports showed that no publications announcement was prepared for two of them. Nor were these two publications sold through GPO. Any copies sent into the field were sent free-of-charge directly from NCES. Announcements for one of the other two technical documents were sent to elementary and secondary education associations, House and Senate education committees, state education agencies, business and industry trade groups, education researchers, and the media. The document itself was distributed to state statistics centers, internally within ED, and externally only to individuals who had previously expressed a specific interest in the SASS data.

Announcements for the other technical report went to select elementary and secondary education associations and state education agencies. Copies of the publication were mailed only to individuals who had earlier expressed a direct interest in SASS data.

Some technical reports are available through GPO. All of them are available free-of-charge by telephoning a member of the SASS program staff, NLE, NEDRC, or ED Pubs. They also appear on NCES's Web site.

No formal mechanism exists to learn how useful SASS technical reports are to those individuals who receive them.

SASS Issue Briefs

SASS issue briefs put high-interest topics that emerge from SASS data collection before a number of audiences. They aim to highlight information on a specific topic, taking up only two sides of a single sheet of paper.

Issue briefs are intended for busy lay people. The writers of issue briefs assume that these people have limited reading time, but must, for a variety of reasons, keep up with the latest data on schools and their staffs. Issue brief readers may be staff on Capitol Hill or in state education agencies, or perhaps members of the press who follow legislative issues and policymaking at the federal, state, and local levels.

NCES published the first SASS issue brief in 1992. The information in it was drawn from the 1987-88 administration of SASS and the 1988-89 Teacher Followup Survey. Since then, SASS staff have published 24 issue briefs on a variety of topics, including professional development programs for aspiring school principals, the kinds of credential and tests districts require as they hire new teachers, the number of public and private school principals who are women, teacher migration and attrition, and extended-day programs in public and private schools. The greatest number of issue briefs (10) have been published on data pertaining to teachers. Data on principals were the subject of five issue briefs, and data on public and private schools were the subject of four.

To make reading issue briefs as easy as possible, much of the information is in headline form. The headlines are printed in colored ink so that they stand out. The goal is for a reader to glance at a brief and quickly understand the gist of the issue. Generally, there is one table on each of the publication's two sides. These tables serve to break up the text and provide readers with additional data. Each issue brief also contains references and directs readers to contact a member of the SASS program staff for more information, including information about the known sources of error in the survey.

The dissemination of issue briefs follows NCES' standard publications procedure. The project director and SASS program leader meet with the editor and NCES' publications director to identify categories of individuals from OERI's larger mailing list who may have an interest in the topic of the brief. The publication is then sent free of charge to those individuals. Recent mailings have totaled 2,500, with another 500 copies distributed within ED. Elementary and secondary education organizations are the largest audience group to be mailed issue briefs, followed by state education agencies. Issue briefs are also distributed by NLE, NEDRC, ED Pubs, and made available through ERIC and the NCES Web site. In addition, the SASS program staff respond to requests for copies of the briefs from individuals who have either heard about them from their colleagues or seen electronic copies on the web and want hard copy.

As with other publications that report data from SASS, no formal mechanisms exist to evaluate them or to obtain reader feedback.

SASS Working Papers

Working papers on SASS are part of a larger series of working papers produced by NCES. They document the evolution of the survey and describe work in progress. Furthermore, they provide a mechanism through which NCES is able to share the knowledge gleaned from the development of the survey with others so that they can use it in their own endeavors.

Readers of the working papers, according to SASS program staff, are sophisticated data users who have a research, policy, or program interest in the subject of the paper or an interest in SASS itself.

SASS program staff have produced 58 working papers since NCES established the working paper series in 1994. Topics for working papers emerge from technical, methodological, or evaluation issues that program staff encounter or from particular staff interests. Topics may cover the development of a module or a set of questions; an issue in research or methodology; a data need; or data quality. Recent working papers have explored, for example, the nature and extent of the professional development offered teachers, with recommendations on ways to enhance data collection in this vital area. Working papers may also consist of a collection of smaller papers around a specialized topic or be the basis for presentations at symposia of professional associations such as the American Statistical Association. In these cases, they also appear in the proceedings of the meeting.

Because it is costly and time consuming to produce formal reports on every aspect of SASS development and work, working papers do not undergo NCES' rigorous adjudication or editing process. The program director, with the approval of the division director, decides whether a working paper will be made available to a larger audience but NCES does not formally publish them. However, primarily because of the present team leader's belief that such a system is vital both to the development of SASS and to the larger field of survey methodology, these working papers represent a major effort among the SASS program staff and their contractors to share their knowledge and expertise.

Working papers about SASS range from 15 pages to over 100 pages in length. They are mostly text, with few figures or charts. Because they are not part of NCES' formal publications program, they do not have NCES' distinctive SASS cover. Nonetheless, their covers are consistent from one paper to the next, clearly identifying the contents as part of the working paper series.

The dissemination mechanisms for these papers are simple. Copies are sent to the SASS Technical Review Panel for their information and to select staff in OERI. They are also available on NCES' Web site. Often, program staff distribute the papers through their own collegial networks. Other users are survey methodologists who hear presentations about the work at professional meetings and then

write or call for the paper itself. A listing of all working papers appears at the back of each working paper and generates requests. Program staff estimate that it distributes approximately 50-100 copies per working paper in this fashion. There is no formal mechanism for obtaining reader feedback on the papers and no information about the papers' appropriateness, usability, or accessibility for external audiences. Internally, however, they provide a written record for researchers on the development of SASS.

In Summary

This profile of SASS publications has described NCES' purposes and strategies in disseminating SASS descriptive reports, analytic reports, technical reports, issue briefs, and working papers. Since 1991, SASS program staff have produced 133 of these reports on teachers, principals, schools, school districts, and the processes in the survey itself. Each type of report contains its own kind of data presentation and is directed toward a specific audience. Descriptive reports and issue briefs describe SASS data for large numbers of lay readers. Analytic reports examine the data from a public policy perspective, making observations or identifying trends for policymakers. Technical reports are for a specialized audience of survey researchers and contribute to the understanding of the quality of the data as well as the professional knowledge base. Finally, working papers document the evolution of SASS and share knowledge emerging from SASS methodology with others.

Phase Two
Survey of Customer Perceptions About the Appropriateness, Usability, and Accessibility of SASS Publications

The second phase of this publications review explores customer perceptions about the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of SASS publications. Through telephone interviews, PSA reviewers collected information from a targeted set of individuals who were known to have some experience using SASS publications. Customers were asked to respond to questions in four broad areas:

1. What are customers' data needs?

2. How appropriate are SASS publications for customers' data needs? (This addresses issues associated with the content and timeliness of SASS publications.)

3. How usable are SASS publications for customers' data needs? (This addresses issues associated with the format, readability, and organization of SASS publications.)

4. How accessible are SASS publications? (This addresses issues associated with the methods and ease of obtaining SASS publications.)

There was no expectation that this part of the publications review would be based on a representative sample of all users of SASS print products. Rather, PSA reviewers collected information from select customers in state education agencies, education associations, universities, and educational research organizations to understand how these customers use SASS data products and their opinions of the products' appropriateness, usability, and accessibility.

Potential respondents in each of the 50 state education agencies were identified from state education agency staff directories and lists of individuals who coordinated SASS in that state or served on NCES committees. If the first state education agency contact was not the appropriate individual to respond to the survey, PSA interviewers asked to be directed to someone else more likely to use SASS publications. If that individual indicated that he or she were still not the appropriate respondent, the referral process continued until the appropriate respondent was identified or the referral process was exhausted. This process yielded 30 survey respondents from state education agencies. In all, PSA contacted 118 potential respondents in state education agencies. The SASS program staff provided PSA staff with names of individuals from education associations, universities, and other education agency research organizations. PSA surveyed 19 of these individuals.

PSA staff analyzed the collected information according to two customer categories, state education agency respondents and other key customers. Within the group of other key customers, and where appropriate, data were further assessed according to the respondent's primary affiliation with either public or private schools.

Appropriateness of SASS Publications

SASS customers need data on many topics. What are these topics? Do SASS publications provide what they need? This section focuses on whether representatives from state education agencies and other key customers think SASS publications are appropriate to their data needs. Respondents were asked seven questions:

- What are customers' data needs?
- What non-SASS data sources do customers use?
- What SASS publications do customers use?
- For what purposes do customers use SASS publications?
- How appropriate is the content of SASS publications to customers' needs?
- What changes in content would make the SASS publications more appropriate?
- How well do the timing and periodicity of SASS publications meet customers' needs?

What Are Customers' Data Needs?

The first question sought to determine SASS customers' data needs and the avenues or products that customers generally used to fulfill those needs. Representatives from state education agencies and other key customers identified data needs that can be grouped into 12 categories. Customer data needs are as follows:

Teacher Data

- Characteristics--This includes individual information, attitudes, subject area taught, grade level taught, and income/benefits.
- Quality--This includes basic measures of teacher qualifications such as certification, academic preparation, and experience.

- Career Paths--This includes recruitment and hiring, entry into teaching, preparation, induction, and exits from teaching.

- Professional Development--This includes the type and content of professional development.

Administrator Data

- Characteristics and background of administrative staff

School Data

- Student Characteristics--This includes demographic information and special needs.

- Enrollments and Class Size--This includes numbers of students and teacher/pupil ratios.

- School Violence

- Standards, Assessment, and Outcomes--This includes graduation, dropout, and retention rates.

- Teaching Conditions--This includes teachers' perception of classroom management and teacher preparation time.

- Program Information--This includes information on curricula and the impact of federal programs.

District Data

- Financial Data—This includes per pupil expenditures; local, state, and federal revenues; and costs of buildings, materials, and supplies.

Exhibit 2 presents these and other data on respondents' data needs. Of this array, data about teacher career paths emerged as the most frequently cited need by both state education agency representatives and other key customers. This reflects an interest in state education agencies and other organizations to understand factors that may affect the supply and demand for teachers. The second most frequently mentioned need, as expressed by both sets of customers, was for data on teacher characteristics. Data of particular interest to key customers from private school organizations, however, pertained to school finance issues.

Exhibit 2
Data Needs Identified by State Education Agency Representatives and Other Key Customers: November 1998

Data Need	SEA Representatives (n=30)	Public School Key Customers (n=12)	Private School Key Customers (n=7)	Total Other Key Customers (n=19)	Total (n=49)
Teacher Data					
Characteristics	24	8	2	10	34
Quality	20	4	1	5	25
Career Paths	25	12	2	14	39
Professional Development	2	5	0	6	8
Administrator Data					
Administrative & Other Staffing	3	4	1	5	8
School Data					
Student Characteristics	11	2	2	4	15
Enrollments & Class Size	15	3	2	5	20
Violence	2	0	0	0	2
Standards, Assessment & Outcomes	8	0	0	0	2
Teaching Conditions	2	0	0	0	2
Program Information	2	1	1	2	4
District Data					
Financial Data	8	1	6	7	15

Exhibit reads: 24 SEA representatives, 8 public school key customers, 2 private school key customers (for a total of 10 other key customers and an overall total of 34 respondents) said they had a need for data on teacher characteristics.

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What Non-SASS Data Sources Do Customers Use?

Customers use information from many data sources other than SASS. Individual respondents usually listed several sources. When asked to list those data sources that they use, respondents most frequently mentioned other units within NCES. While state education agency representatives most frequently said that teachers' unions—the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—were a source of non-SASS data, all other key customers mentioned other NCES data as addressing their data needs, including *The Condition of Education* and the *Digest of Education Statistics*. Exhibit 3 lists these sources and how frequently they were mentioned.

Exhibit 3
Non-SASS Data Sources Most Frequently Mentioned by State Education Agency Respondents and Other Key Customers: November 1998

Data Source	SEA Representatives (n=30)	Public School Key Customers (n=12)	Private School Key Customers (n=7)	Total Other Key Customers (n=19)	Total (n=49)
Other NCES Data	11	12	7	19	30
Education Organizations	11	2	8	10	21
NEA/AFT	18	2	0	2	20
State Data	12	1	0	1	13
Other Federal Agencies	6	4	2	6	12
Other	6	3	0	0	9

Exhibit reads: 11 SEA representatives, 12 public school key customers, 7 private school key customers (for a total of 19 other key customers and an overall total of 30 respondents) said they most frequently use other NCES data sources.

What SASS Publications Do Customers Use?

When asked to name the SASS publications respondents used, most respondents mentioned *SASS by State* (10), *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile* (9), and *SASS Issue Briefs* (4). A select number of interviewees, 16 representatives from state education agencies and 6 other key

customers, were asked to indicate from a listing of 20 SASS publications which titles they recognized and which publications they had used. Exhibit 4 shows these results.

Exhibit 4
Recognition and Use of SASS Publications by Select Respondents: November 1998
(n=22)

Publication Title	Only Recognize	Recognize and Have Used
Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94 (NCES 96-124)	3	18
America's Teachers, Profile of a Profession (NCES 93-025)	8	13
Characteristics of Stayers, Movers and Leavers: Results from the Teacher Followup Survey, 1994-95 (NCES 97-450)	5	12
Public School Districts in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1987-88 to 1993-94 (NCES 98-203)	8	11
Job Satisfaction Among America's Teachers: Effects of Workplace Conditions, Background Characteristics, and Teacher Compensation, 1993-94 (NCES 97-471)	9	11
SASS by State, 1993-94, Schools and Staffing Survey: Selected State Results (NCES 96-312)	9	10
Public and Private School Principals in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1987-88 and 1993-94 (NCES 97-455)	9	7
Private Schools in the U.S.: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94 (NCES 97-459)	9	8
Time Spent Teaching Core Academic Subjects in Elementary Schools: Comparison Across Community, School, Teacher and Student Characteristics (NCES 97-293)	6	7
Out-of-Field Teaching and Educational Equality (NCES 96-040)	7	7
Private School Universe Survey, 1995-96 (NCES 98-229)	7	7
Public School Choice Programs, 1993-94: Availability and Student Participation (NCES 97-909)	3	7
1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey: Sample Design and Estimation (NCES 96-089)	2	6

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Exhibit 4 (Continued)
Recognition and Use of SASS Publications by Select Respondents

Publication Title	Only Recognize	Recognize and Have Used
Credentials and Tests in Teacher Hiring: What Do Districts Require? (NCES 97-592)	3	5
Teacher Professionalization and Teacher Commitment: A Multi-Level Analysis (NCES 97-069)	8	5
Schools Serving Family Needs: Extended-Day Programs in Public and Private Schools (NCES 97-590)	2	5
Measurement Error Studies at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 97-464)	3	4
Private Schools in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1990-91 (NCES 95-330)	2	3
An Analysis of Total Non-Response in the 1993-94 School and Staffing Survey (NCES 98-243)	6	2
An Exploratory Analysis of Nonrespondents in the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES 96-338)	2	0

Exhibit reads: 3 respondents said they recognized *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile* by title and 18 respondents said they recognized and have used this publication.

For What Purposes Do Customers Use SASS Publications?

State education agency representatives and other key customers turn to SASS publications for many purposes. When asked for what purposes they use these publications, representatives from state education agencies mentioned four different purposes.[2]

- To supply data to state officials, including the governor, chief state school officer, legislature, and media (9)
- To respond to other requests for data (9)
- To compare their state data with that of other states (6)
- To use the data in their own state reports (6)

[2] Because many respondents did not distinguish between the questions, "For what purpose do you use SASS data?" and "What do you do with the SASS data?" responses to these questions were analyzed together as one question.

The most frequently mentioned purpose for using SASS data among other key customers was:

- To inform decision-making (14)
- To include in oral or written presentations (6)
- To use as a resource for their own research (6)
- To contribute to planning (4)

One state respondent said, "Some of the local newspapers have used SASS data, and [we also use the data] to try to clarify the information or defend ourselves." The example used concerned teachers teaching out of field.

How Appropriate Is the Content of SASS Publications to Customers' Needs?

Overwhelmingly, representatives of state education agencies and other key customers from public and private school organizations saw the content of SASS publications as being appropriate to their needs. Exhibit 5 tells the story.

Exhibit 5
State Education Agency Representatives' and Other Key Customers' Views of the Appropriateness of the Content of SASS Publications: November 1998

Level of Appropriateness	SEA Representatives (n=30)	Other Key Customers (n=19)
Very Appropriate	5	6
Appropriate	18	8
Fairly Appropriate	4	5
Not Appropriate	3	0

Exhibit reads: 5 SEA representatives and 6 other key customers said the content of SASS publications was very appropriate.

What Changes in Content Would Make the SASS Publications More Appropriate?

SASS users in state education agencies and other key customers provided numerous recommendations for making SASS publications more appropriate to their needs. State education agency representatives suggested:

- Making the original survey instruments available by placing them in an appendix or in a companion document
- Adding a one-page profile of each state to *SASS By State*
- Provide information on rural schools, e.g., teacher supply and demand in rural areas
- Not collecting data already collected by the *Common Core of Data*
- Releasing preliminary results as soon as possible after SASS data are collected and analyzed
- Providing more information on:
  - -- Professional development
  - -- Teachers' routes to the classroom
  - -- Student assessment
  - -- Standards
  - -- Accountability systems
  - -- School violence
  - -- Salary comparisons
  - -- Administrators' backgrounds and positions
  - -- Student enrollment and teacher supply and demand projections
  - -- Dropout rates
- Allowing states to pay for the collection of additional information individual states need on their state surveys
- Placing data on-line so they can be downloaded
- Focusing teacher questions on certification rather than college minors
- Reducing the time lag between surveys by conducting interim surveys on single topics, i.e., weapons/violence in schools, free and reduced price lunch statistics, and ways states are recruiting teachers for rural schools
- Separating out teacher data for grades 7-8 and 9-12 as did earlier versions of SASS
- Producing shorter, summary publications with trend data and regional information

- Targeting certain topics rather than explaining everything
- Explaining definitions in more detail

Other key customers made the following suggestions to make SASS data publications more appropriate to their needs:

- Producing more Issue Briefs
- Creating a key word cross referencing system for all NCES publications
- Providing data on large districts
- Providing more data on:
  - -- School finance
  - -- Growth stages of private schools, i.e., acquiring buildings, start-up funds, teacher characteristics, operating on small budgets
  - -- Organizational structure of schools, i.e., numbers of associate superintendents in large districts, number of joint position superintendents in small districts, division of responsibility in joint positions
  - -- Teacher testing for credentialling
  - -- Staffing in specialty schools, e.g., magnet and charter schools
  - -- Teachers' training in special education and in instructing students who are not proficient in English
  - -- Trends in teacher's professional development
  - -- Accountability and student assessment
  - -- Teacher access to instructional materials
  - -- Student poverty levels, e.g., numbers of students receiving free/reduced price lunch
  - -- Student race/ethnicity
  - -- Charter schools

How Well Do the Timing and Periodicity of SASS Publications Meet Customers' Needs?

The periodicity of SASS data publications emerged as a major issue for a large number of respondents in this publications review. Among representatives of state education agencies, 19 said that SASS publications would be more useful if the survey were conducted at more frequent intervals. A number of respondents stated that "The data are too old," "The period between surveys is too long," "The data are not timely," and "I don't use SASS because the data are very old, and I can usually find more current data elsewhere."

Timing and periodicity bothered other state education agency representatives less. Five state education agency representatives said the timing was acceptable to them. One commented that the timing is "appropriate considering the amount of work it takes." Two state education agency respondents said that while they would like more up-to-date information, the data are still helpful. One of these respondents commented, "Of course we would like more current data but we're not willing to sacrifice quality."

One respondent expressed concern that the changes in periodicity of SASS affects its usefulness as trend data and makes it unpredictable because users don't know when to expect new SASS survey data. Another respondent advised aligning the SASS survey years with other NCES surveys to create a richer data set.

Other key customers were almost equally divided in their opinion about SASS timing and periodicity. Six said the data were fine for their needs. Seven key customers said the publications are still helpful, even if they come out late. Among their comments were, "I wish it were more current but that may be unavoidable," "It would be nice if it were more recent and more often, but we understand," and "Not bad for the government, but three year intervals would be better." Another six key customers indicated the data are published too seldom to be useful. Most customers who suggested a more useful survey schedule recommended that NCES administer SASS every two or three years. Exhibit 6 illustrates the responses to this question about the periodicity of SASS publications.

Exhibit 6
State Education Agency Representatives' and Other Key Customers' Views of SASS Periodicity: November 1998

Periodicity	SEA Representatives (n=30)	Other Key Customers (n=19)
Data Are Too Old	21	6
Data Are Old, But Still Useful	4	7
Data Not a Problem	5	6

Exhibit reads: 21 SEA representatives and 6 other key customers said SASS data are too old.

Usability of SASS Publications

State education agency representatives and other key customers were asked four questions about the usability of SASS data publications. These were:

- How well do current data formats support customer needs?
- To what extent do customers use the data tables in SASS publications? How do customers use the data tables? Are the data tables clear?
- To what extent do customers read the text in SASS publications?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to customers of using the data tables and/or the text?

How Well Do Current Data Formats Support Customer Needs?

Most customers interviewed appear to be pleased with the format of SASS publications. When asked how well the format of these publications supports their needs, 19 respondents from state education agencies replied "Well." Another 6 respondents replied that the format was usable, adequate, or supported their needs moderately. Five state education agency respondents said that they were not familiar enough with the range of SASS publications to answer this question.

Other key customers were nearly unanimous in their opinion that data in SASS publications are well laid out and easy to use. "They give many ways to look at the data. It's encyclopedic," one commented.

Another key customer, who said that the data formats are generally fine, nonetheless noted that minority enrollment tables are broken out unevenly, "so that the extremes are lumped into larger groupings." This customer continued, "I can understand why NCES breaks it out to compare across the spectrum, but it makes it harder to understand the extremes. From a policy perspective, I would like to focus on extremities rather than having data broken into even quartiles."

A third key customer, who generally commented positively about SASS data formats, explained that the column data in some tables are too broad for his use. He said, "The race/ethnicity information should be column data rather than row variables. We want to see the full array of characteristics of schools serving low-income kids."

According to a fourth key customer, "The only disadvantage to the format is that the standard errors are in the appendix."

One other key customer criticized SASS data formats, saying that the publications contain so much data that it is difficult to find specifics.

To What Extent Do Customers Use the Data Tables in SASS Publications?

Data tables are the most frequent source of SASS data for the state education agency representatives and other key customers interviewed. In all, 20 of the 30 state education representatives questioned said they use the data tables typically, mostly, or more than the text. Two said they use the text most often. Five state education agency representatives said they use the data tables just as much as the text, and three could not say which they used more frequently.

Twelve other key customers indicated they use the data tables either entirely or a lot more than they use the text. Three said they rely more on the text than they do the data tables, and two said they use them equally. Two other key customers did not distinguish between the two.

How Do Customers Use the Data Tables?

When asked how they use the SASS data tables, state education agency representatives and other key customers said they used the tables to:

- Reproduce and disseminate to others
- Answer questions from others
- Compare their state data with other states
- Reproduce them in their own publications
- Make more complicated tables

Are the Data Tables Clear?

There were no differences of opinion between state education representatives and other key customers about this question. Respondents in both groups unanimously stated the data tables were clear. Only one key customer said using different definitions across NCES publications was troublesome, but that "This is not so much SASS' problem as it is a problem for NCES." This same respondent also noted that definitions were not helpful as they should be.

To What Extent Do You Use the Text?

Most users of SASS publications refer considerably less to the text than the charts. As mentioned previously, only two state education agency representatives said they read the text often or as much as they did the tables. Others said they read the highlights and summaries, skim the text, or refer to it to interpret information or clarify definitions. Six state education representatives said they seldom refer to the text at all.

Of the other key customers interviewed, three said that they use the text more than the tables, another two used tables and text just about equally. Another two could not say which they used most often. "The text really isn't relevant because it is someone else's limited interpretation," one core customer observed.

Exhibit 7 compares the use of tables and text in SASS publications.

Exhibit 7
State Education Agency Representatives' and Other Key Customers' Use of Tables and Text in SASS Publications: November 1998

Use	SEA Representatives (n=30)	Other Key Customers (n=19)
Tables Most	20	12
Text Most	2	3
Both Equally	5	2
Could Not Say	3	2

Exhibit reads: 20 SEA representatives and 12 other key customers said they use the tables most in SASS publications.

Both state education agency respondents and other key customers who use the text occasionally or often said they use it to:

- Understand the tables better
- Figure out what the questions were that generated the data
- Clarify the data
- Get a broad idea of what the data are indicating
- Help identify points
- Get summaries, observations, and analyses

SASS users who read the text were unanimous in their opinion that the writing was clear.

Several respondents commented that having both text and tables is useful because "people have different ways of learning." Another said both are necessary because "the text gives a general picture and the tables give specific information." Still another said that while "the data tables and graphs are quicker to use, the text can give helpful analysis." Another respondent praised the balance between tables and text in SASS publications. One respondent who reads the text "a little bit" noted it was useful because it cites relevant literature and earlier studies that allow users to connect the data to other research.

Accessibility of SASS Publications

Respondents were asked three questions to gauge the accessibility of SASS publications. These were:

- How do customers obtain SASS publications? Are the publications easy to get? Do the publications arrive in a timely fashion?
- Has the customer ever contacted NCES/SASS staff after reading a publication? If yes, for what purpose?
- Has the customer used other NCES services to obtain SASS data?

How Do Customers Obtain SASS Publications?

Representatives from state education agencies most frequently said they received SASS publications automatically through the mail because they were on the SASS mailing list. In all, 18 said they received SASS publications this way. Another 10 said they obtain SASS publications at conferences. Six state education agency representatives also said that SASS publications were sometimes routed to them from other offices within their agency. One respondent did not know how the SASS publications arrived.

All of the other key customers interviewed said they received SASS publications because they were on the mailing list. However, respondents expressed some confusion about the distribution of SASS publications. They thought they were on the mailing list for some, but not all, SASS publications. One key customer said he receives them "randomly" and that the distribution system seems "unclear." A second key customer commented that the SASS mailing list is "a weird system" because he gets some publications but not others. This same respondent complained about the difficulty of obtaining SASS publications that are out of print. He suggested NCES try to ascertain the unmet demand for these publications and then reprint them. Several respondents indicated that they would like more information on what publications are available.

The vast majority of state agency respondents found SASS publications easy to obtain if they knew about them. All of the other key customers interviewed agreed on this point. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents, both state education agency representatives and other key customers, indicated the publications arrived in a timely fashion.

Many users have contacted NCES after reading a SASS publication. Among state education agency representatives, 14 had done so and among other key customers, 16 had contacted SASS program staff after reading a SASS publication. One respondent said, "I've contacted NCES when I might have seen other documents that might be useful, or sometimes I've spoken to the text's authors for clarification. They always respond and are helpful."

Among the reasons respondents gave for contacting NCES were:

- Asking for clarification of data (14)
- Ordering publications (13)
- Requesting additional data (11)
- Reporting an error (1)

In addition to SASS publications, some respondents said they had used other NCES services to obtain SASS data. Most frequently, respondents had turned to the NCES web site. Of state education agency representatives interviewed, 11 had used the web site, while 3 had used CD-ROMs to obtain SASS data. One respondent described how he has assembled a virtual data center for their state education agencies to guide other staff to data on the Web. It has 13 links to SASS.
One each among other key customers mentioned using CD-ROMs, e-mail, the web site, and data tapes to obtain SASS data.

In Summary

This survey of select SASS users suggests that SASS publications are appropriate, usable, and accessible. Respondents said they found the content of SASS publications appropriate to their data needs. The formats of SASS publications were easy to understand, and the tables and text were both clear. As one respondent put it, "In terms of clarity, presentation of text, discussion of methodology, etc., NCES' publications are as good as it gets." Respondents also said that the publications were easily accessible, as was additional data information for those who had contacted NCES after reading a SASS publication.

If there was any disappointment with SASS data publications expressed by respondents, it was that the SASS data were not current enough to always be appropriate for respondents' data needs. They suggested that SASS be conducted every two to three years so that the data would be more current.

Phase Three
SASS Focus Group Discussion
February 5, 1999

This section of the report summarizes the results of Phase 3 of this review of SASS publications. Phase 3 consisted of a focus group convened for the specific purpose of finding out what customers have to say about the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of two SASS publications in particular--*Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94 (SASS Statistical Profile)* and *SASS by State 1993-94 (SASS by State).*

Nine focus group members represented the federal government, state education agencies (SEAs), private data management organizations, policy research firms, and private school associations. All had been invited to participate in the focus group because they were known to be regular and frequent users of SASS data products and, therefore, could be expected to recommend ways that NCES could improve the presentation of data in publications under discussion to appeal to a broader range of customers.

Much of the focus group discussion probed deeper into issues that had surfaced during the Phase Two telephone interviews. The following pages describe the conversation and the group's recommendations for improving the appropriateness, usability, and accessibility of the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*.

It is important to note that while these recommendations concentrate on ways to change SASS publications, this in no way implies significant user dissatisfaction with present SASS data products. The vast majority of focus group members indicated they value SASS and consider SASS publications an extremely useful resource. Their willingness to invest time in this focus group activity reflects the high regard in which the hold the survey.

Appropriateness of SASS Publications

Focus group participants first addressed the appropriateness of the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State* for their data needs. The conversation centered on six questions:

- For what data needs do customers use these SASS publications?
- For what purposes do customers use these SASS publications?
- How appropriate is the content of the *SASS Statistical Profile* for customers' needs?
- How appropriate is *SASS by State* for customers' needs?
- How appropriate is SASS technical information to customers' data needs?
- What types of additional services would help meet customers' data needs?

For What Data Needs Do Customers Use SASS Publications?

State department of education staff turn to SASS publications largely for two types of data needs. First, they use SASS publications to obtain data they do not have within their own state systems. "I use data from our own tables first, and move to SASS if what I want is not there," one participant offered. The second type of data need SASS publications commonly fulfill for SEA staff is to allow them to compare the education characteristics of their state with those of other states. States that draw the most interest are those in their region, rather than further away or in the nation at large. Among the topics they compare are: state rankings, teacher supply and demand, professional development, new teacher experiences, teachers teaching outside their field, and instructional practices.

One focus group member looks to the data in SASS publications to help compare nations on topics such as teacher salary, experience, qualifications, and attrition. Several people said they rely on the data in SASS publications for economic indicators such as the number of students who are poor, or who are participating in free and reduced-price lunch and Title I programs. Other topics for which SASS publications are a source of data are demographics of schools and districts in their regions, teacher backgrounds, school safety, and finance. Participants noted that they don't often directly compare SASS data with their own data.

For What Purposes Do Customers Use These SASS Publications?

Participants use the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State* for many purposes, such as to research policy issues and initiatives, support program planning, and respond to requests from the press and others seeking data. In explaining the value of SASS data, one frequent SASS user observed, "Data from others influences the decisions we make." Another participant described using SASS data in a statewide study of the teaching profession because the state itself did not collect such information. "We

could get that data nowhere else," he declared. A third person recounted using SASS data to fill in gaps in other, smaller studies in order to get a more complete picture of a situation. "Depending on the question and where it is coming from, I may copy a page to share or analyze a table," a participant explained. The frequency with which these SASS users turn to SASS ranges from daily, according to some participants, to monthly, according to others.

How Appropriate Is the Content of the *SASS Statistical Profile* for Customers' Needs?

Focus group members expressed general satisfaction with the topics within the *SASS Statistical Profile*, although one participant remarked that information on school choice, charter schools, and public/private school competition issues would be valuable. Nonetheless, they offered a number of comments on other aspects of this publication. They emphasized that the way SASS currently breaks down variables is often too broad to be useful. They want more discrete units, especially for indicators that states do not generally collect their own data on, such as school safety. They specifically mentioned breaking down student data along the additional dimensions of age, poverty, achievement, and grade rather than by elementary, secondary, and combined. Similarly, they wanted teacher data broken down by content area taught and instructional practices. "Are there differences between teachers of different subjects?" one focus group member wanted to know. Another group member concurred this was important data.

While many *SASS Statistical Profile* tables contain percentages, this group of data users would like corresponding tables with actual numbers, or at least some indication of the numbers from which the percentages were derived. They noted further that the *SASS Statistical Profile* should refer readers to other potentially relevant SASS data. At present, it does not do this. "I think that when people see this, they think these are all the tables there are in SASS. People need to know that there are tables available other than those in the *Profile*," one participant commented.

Regarding the quantity of information provided in the *SASS Statistical Profile*, one participant called the amount of information "just between just right and not enough." A second reflected, "Sometimes the tables that I need are not there." Participants would especially like more state tables in the *SASS Statistical Profile*, even if it means duplicating tables from other SASS publications.

Recommendations:

- Break down data by additional variables, including:
  - -- Age
  - -- Grade
  - -- Achievement
  - -- Poverty
  - -- Instructional practices
  - -- Content area taught
- Provide the numbers that generated percentages
- Refer users to other appropriate publications
- Include more state tables

How Appropriate Is *SASS by State* for Customers' Needs?

One participant remarked that he did not understand why school media centers and libraries received so much attention in SASS. However, a colleague from a state that had just budgeted a large amount of money for libraries and media centers countered that having such information in SASS was very useful in the state's recent policy discussion on this topic.

The tables on pages 181-188 of *SASS by State* generated considerable discussion. These tables provide the actual number of respondents, and are helpful in interpreting other tables in the publication that report percentages. Several focus group members advised reorganizing the publication so that these tables appear up front. Placing them in the back, they said, results in people not knowing they are there and missing out on valuable information.

Another SASS user said, "The highlights section in this document is missing the boat. I don't want the answers to the questions the publication is addressing here. I want this front section to tell me what *questions* this publication will answer. I want a one-page bulleted list that tells me what I can get from this publication." The focus group agreed that, overall, the table of contents in the *SASS Statistical Profile* is more usable than the one in *SASS by State* because it is more informative and easier to read. A chart showing what data are included in what publications could be useful in quickly accessing needed information. A final suggestion was to reorganize *SASS by State* so that the text and tables appear in separate sections of the book. (Other comments pertaining to the tables of contents in the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State* appear under the heading, "How easily can customers find what they need in these SASS publications?" on page 37.)

Recommendations:

- Reorganize *SASS by State* so that the tables on pages 181-188 come first
- Provide a more informative and easier to read table of contents and index

How Appropriate Is SASS Technical Information for Customers' Data Needs?

The discussion turned next to the appropriateness of SASS technical information. SASS users suggested that it would be helpful to reference which SASS questions/data collection instruments elicited which data in the tables. "Data should be put in context of what it is in response to, or how it was gathered. This should be right there with the tables. Then I could copy that page and send it off to people. Currently, I must look to find this information and attach it," one respondent said. Another respondent added, "Perhaps another text could be produced that helps identify the variables used in getting the data. Right now, the technical information doesn't meet my needs." This discussant proposed citing the survey and question number that generated the data in a footnote. Another suggested producing a technical manual or creating a web site that includes the variables used to create the data reported. Another suggestion was to include a copy of the survey instruments used with the publication.

More than one focus group member pointed out that the tables in the two SASS publications being reviewed do not provide totals for numbers, and that they often have to add the numbers themselves. They suggested that SASS tables include more subtotals and totals in the tables throughout the publications. Aggregate data would be very useful. Participants further suggested the totals in tables be printed in boldface type.

Definitions of words and terms sometimes pose another dilemma in the use of SASS publications. Participants said that the definitions in the *SASS Statistical Profile* are better than those in *SASS by State* because they are clearer and more plentiful. They underscored the need for NCES to make its definitions consistent across all its publications—SASS and non-SASS. At present they are not. The term "out-of field teaching" illustrates the problem that definitions raise. If out-of-field is defined as not having a major or minor in the subject taught, it does not accurately describe people who did not major or minor in a subject but who followed some other route to become certified to teach it. To resolve this, the categories of out-of-field teaching, teaching without having majored in the subject area, and teaching without certification should be clarified and SASS data analyzed accordingly.

Participants would also like NCES to provide easy-to-understand definitions of technical terms, such as standard error, that they could use when explaining tables and data to nontechnical people.

Nearly everyone agreed they would like SASS publications to provide more trend data, perhaps creating individual publications on particular trends. One discussant said, "The trend data exists at NCES, but NCES is not letting people know about it well enough. A separate trend publication would be helpful." Another participant pointed out that trend data can be helpful in educating the public that data that are several years old, such as SASS data, can still be useful: "When a trend publication comes out, it is apparent that data does not change that much. This can be cited as support of data that seems to be several years old. Also, trend data can be used to keep a publication more current."

Recommendations:

- Link tables to SASS questions/data collection
- Define terms clearly and keep definitions consistent across NCES documents
- Provide easy-to-understand definitions of technical terms
- Include more totals and subtotals in tables
- Provide more trend data

What Types of Additional Services Would Help Meet Customers' Data Needs?

While SASS program staff has not proposed offering such a service, participants in the telephone survey mentioned that they would be interested in having SASS provide data to them in other ways. The focus group probed this idea further, with participants offering several suggestions for ways that NCES could expand its services. However, they all said they would want NCES to offer additional services only if they did not interfere with the release of regular SASS data and data publications.

Several SEA discussants replied they would consider paying NCES for special data services, such as oversampling. They expressed interest in obtaining state-level SASS data broken out by variables identified by their states. However, they also said that if they had easier access to their own state's SASS data, they could analyze it themselves. NCES would not have to do it for them. For some, this was even the preferable option. They would be interested in obtaining other states' data as well, but recognized the potential confidentiality issues that this would raise since some data could be traced back to teachers, schools, and school districts. They suggested that one way to eliminate this problem would be for NCES to aggregate individual district, school, and teacher responses before passing data on to the states.

Recommendations:

- Provide an option to oversample subgroups defined by the state
- Offer to break down data according to variables requested by states
- Provide more information to states on data collected about them, and perhaps on other states as well

Usability of SASS Publications

For SASS publications to be useful in policy and research, users must find what they are looking for easily and understand the information once they find it. During this portion of the focus group discussion, participants exchanged views in six areas pertaining to the usability of the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*. These were:

- How easily can customers find what they need in these SASS publications?
- To what extent do customers read the text in the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*?
- To what extent to customers use the data tables in the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*?
- The tables in the *SASS Statistical Profile* break down data by public and private schools, showing them on facing pages. How useful is such a design?
- To what extent and for what purposes do customers use the tables in *SASS by State*? The bar graphs? The maps of the United States? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- How usable are SASS data categories for customers' needs?

How Easily Can Customers Find What They Need in These SASS Publications?

Participants described how they approached the two SASS documents under discussion. Because the documents are constructed differently, users approached them differently. To find the information they need in the *SASS Statistical Profile*, they often start with the table of contents, moving on to the index if necessary. The table of contents in *SASS by State*, however, is not as helpful, and so users often must leaf through the document to find the information they need.

To improve the usability of SASS publications, participants suggested that NCES use boldface key descriptors of the information in the titles of tables in a table of contents. The true table titles are important, but are much too long to locate information quickly. For example, Table 7.2 in the *SASS Statistical Profile* is currently entitled "Of schools with teaching vacancies, percentage that used various methods to fill them, by selected school characteristics." While this title is important to include in the text, SASS could place a title such as "Schools' Methods for Filling Teacher Vacancies" in the table of contents.

Similarly, *SASS by State* should have an index to make the publication easier to navigate.

Recommendations:

- Include bold-face descriptors in table titles
- Add an index to *SASS by State*

To What Extent Do Customers Read the Text in the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*?

Although participants overwhelmingly favor the tables over the text—95 percent of the time—they thought it wise for NCES to continue to include text because others most likely find it useful. "I don't use the text unless it will help me understand a table," said one participant. The role of the text, most participants agreed, is to "point out stuff that is not easily seen." For that reason, while they hardly ever read the full text, several SASS users noted they do like the bullets and boxes and do read the red-highlighted "pull-out" text. "The text is valuable in its ability to highlight things I would otherwise gloss over," explained one focus group member.

Focus group members also surmised that the text's analyses of significant data could be helpful to others. The media are among those whom they think would rely more on the text than the tables. "They can't read the tables and pull out important information," one participant said.

Overall, participants found the text to be easily readable. They suggested highlighting more key points in the text so they stand out for individuals who otherwise might not read it.

Recommendations:

- Retain the text
- Highlight more key findings

To What Extent Do Customers Use the Data Tables in the *SASS Statistical Profile* and in *SASS by State*?

Participants clearly depend on the SASS tables more than the text. "We are numbers people who want to make our own interpretation," explained one focus group member. "Tables offer more possibilities for us."

Tables allow them to interpret data in a variety of ways, whereas text restricts understanding of what the numbers say. Users can compare one figure with many others in a table and examine many relationships. Also, a table can answer a lot of questions in a small amount of space. One participant put it this way: "Text is limiting. A table can speak volumes."

The Tables in the *SASS Statistical Profile* Break Down Data by Public and Private Schools, Showing Them on Facing Pages. How Useful is Such a Design?

Most respondents in this focus group had not had occasion to use private school data. Those who had found it useful to be able to view the public school and the private school data together. However, there was substantial agreement that placing data for public and private schools on facing tables made the data difficult to read. Users said that having the data on one chart would be more useful because they could compare them more easily. Also, they said, the private school data do not stand out from the public school data as well as they might. Bold facing the headings would make the distinctions clearer. Participants also mentioned that totals and aggregate data are not adequate in the charts. They want subcategories totaled as well as overall information. Some participants requested that NCES break down private school data by affiliation by state.

To increase ease in reading the tables, these SASS users suggested using lines or shading to differentiate between rows or columns. It would also be helpful to boldface the totals and other columns or rows that should stand out.

Overall, participants said that table titles are too long and the type is too small. While they find the information in the titles helpful, they suggested bold-facing key words or phrases in the titles (as was suggested for the table of contents) to alert the reader to the data on the table.

In a discussion of the table of contents, participants said that Appendix A of the *SASS Statistical Profile* has the most useful data published for private schools. There simply is no other place to get data on the different sub-groups of private schools. Also, the data are useful in comparing public and private schools, an activity that is taking on increasing importance as public interest in vouchers and privatization grows.

Recommendations:

- Combine public and private school data in one table
- Provide more totals and subtotals within tables
- Use lines, shading, and boldface type to make tables easier to read
- Improve readability of table titles by highlighting key words

To What Extent and for What Purposes Do Customers Use the Tables in *SASS by State*? The Bar Graphs? The Maps of the United States? What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Each?

Each of these different ways of displaying data plays its own role in helping communicate SASS findings. Listing states by their rank order on a variable rather than alphabetically gives the user a quick picture of the data. Bar graphs are useful in comparative data. Maps, too, are helpful for certain indicators, although participants said they might choose some different indicators to show on the maps, or perhaps include maps for all indicators.

Participants suggested that when a publication shows the same data in several different ways—in bar graphs, tables, and maps, for example—these should be placed on joining or facing pages to make it clear to the reader that it is the same data.

Participants talked about the different circumstances under which they use *SASS by State* as opposed to the *SASS Statistical Profile*. For example, if they were seeking information about a state's standing in relation to other states, they would refer to the maps and graphs in *SASS by State*. However, when they needed more detailed information, they usually found that the *SASS Statistical Profile* is more useful. Without the tables, the information in *SASS by State* is incomplete, they said. Also, since the state maps in *SASS by State* are difficult to reproduce, they are difficult to disseminate.

Recommendations:

- Provide more data maps
- Place like-data on opposing pages to show connections
- Increase reproducibility of tables, graphs, and maps

How Usable Are the Following SASS Data Categories for Customers' Needs?

Central city, urban fringe, rural. Some participants said the breakdown was irrelevant to them. It is especially meaningless in states that are almost totally rural.

Elementary, secondary, combined. Participants deemed these school-level categories highly problematic. First, they noted that the definition of combined is unclear, leading some people to think that it referred to a total rather than to the number of schools that encompassed both elementary and secondary grades.

In addition, participants insisted that NCES must make some attempt to capture the concept of middle school, especially since so many of today's education and policy discussions revolve around adolescent development and middle school education. Participants recognized the difficulty of arriving at an acceptable definition of middle schools because there is so much variation in their composition. They suggested perhaps breaking the data down according to several grade configurations—grades six, seven, eight; grades seven and eight; grades seven, eight, and nine; etc.

Minority enrollment (<20% and >20%). Some participants do not find the use of more or less than 20 percent as a minority enrollment break helpful because it provides information only about extremes. However, others, especially representatives from SEAs, found it acceptable for SASS, largely because they use their own state data to look at minority enrollment or use SASS only to gain a general picture. One participant suggested reporting on minority enrollments by quartiles.

Participants pointed out that tables could be difficult to read on this point. For example, in the *SASS Statistical Profile*, Table 2.3, the breakdown by race is misleading because columns 2-5 are subsets of 6. Without examining the columns closely, a user might think that all the columns are mutually exclusive. The relationship between data for different minority groups and for all minority groups needs to be clearer, perhaps by using lines or shading to differentiate relationships.

School size (<150, 150-499, 500-749, and >750). Participants were not particularly interested in breaking data down by school size, considering it arbitrary and saying that one breakdown is as useful as another. They viewed breakdowns that correlated teacher characteristics and poverty, especially the number of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, as more important.

Private school affiliation breakdowns. One participant noted that some states break down private school data according to independent schools and parochial schools to make the information more meaningful.

Recommendations:

- Create a middle schools breakdown
- Break out minority enrollment by quartiles
- Use shading to make columns of data easier to read
- Include more breakdowns of teacher characteristics correlated with poverty
- Provide easy-to-understand definitions of technical terms for use in communicating data to the public

How Well Do the Timing and Periodicity of These SASS Publications Meet Customers' Needs?

Participants were pleased to learn that several advocacy groups are recommending that SASS data collection go on a four-year cycle. When asked about the timing and periodicity of the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*, they unanimously replied that SASS data are not released often enough or close enough to their collection date. One consequence of the lag is that states and other organizations must duplicate parts of the SASS data collection themselves to fulfill their interim data needs. Furthermore, the time span between data collection and its release creates trust issues. The more time that slips by after the collection of SASS data, the less trust (whether warranted or not) there is in SASS data products' ability to reliably fill data needs. Even when data may not change significantly from one data collection to the next, it is difficult to convince people of such.

Respondents mentioned that SASS data remain useful for trend data, even if it is several years old. As noted previously, trend data can be used to keep a publication more current because NCES can continue to publish new findings with data it collected several years previously.

Focus group members conveyed several suggestions for ways NCES could quicken the release of SASS data. Everyone greeted with enthusiasm the recommendation it publish early "first glance" publications that foretell what it will be publishing later. They also endorsed the idea of NCES prioritizing data and work that are most important for customers, and then releasing that information first. And, nearly all focus group members echoed the urging of one of their members when this individual appealed, "Don't let words hold up the data." Also, SASS users would like to know in advance when data will be released.

Technology can make data collection more efficient and get information to users quickly. Options include using scannable surveys or on-line surveys instead of keypunch surveys. This would cut down data entry time and speed up the release of information.

A key approach to speeding up the release of SASS data advocated by several participants is putting the data on the World Wide Web as soon as it is ready. "We shouldn't have to wait for SASS stuff to be printed and distributed to just see it," said one SASS user. "NCES should release whatever is ready as it becomes ready on the Web. Then when it is all finished, it can be put out in print." All participants agreed that using the Web was the most preferable way to access data.

One participant hastened to add, however, that NCES must be careful not to sacrifice the quality of SASS data for the sake of speed. "They shouldn't get stingy on data checking just to rush stuff out. It is good to know that I can count on the data that I get from NCES," this individual said.

Several participants referred their own experiences in releasing data to suggest how NCES might speed up the process of getting SASS data into the field. One participant put forward the notion that NCES could do what one state did and note in its publications who did not respond to the SASS survey in a timely manner. This might embarrass respondents into responding more quickly in the future, increasing the speed of data collection.

Participants reported they have used the media to get information out quickly. Also, some release data early and emphasize it is an estimate. Even if the data are not totally clean, they publish it. There may be some danger in doing this, however, if later estimates prove to be further off than expected.

Participants noted when they release new versions of reports that they have published previously, they use templates to decrease the time to release. Another suggestion was that SASS contract out its data collection on a competitive basis, providing incentives for early completion and disincentives for late completion. Some states already use this method and have found it to be effective.

Recommendations:

- Publish SASS data more often and closer to its collection date
- Publish more trend data
- Publish early "first glance" publications of estimated data
- Prioritize the most useful data and publish that first
- Provide information to the media to get it out more quickly
- Publish information on the Web
- Use technology to expedite data collection
- Use templates to expedite report production
- Provide incentives for data collection contractors to finish early

Accessibility of SASS Publications

The focus group discussed the accessibility of the *SASS Statistical Profile*, *SASS by State*, and other SASS publications, providing suggestions on how to expand their use. The conversation revolved around one issue:

- Who should be receiving SASS documents who may not be?

Who Should Be Receiving SASS Documents Who May Not Be?

In at least one SEA, routing mail pertaining to SASS and maintaining the SASS mailing list is the responsibility of the state NCES contact. This individual must see to it that publications get to the right people. Participants, however, named four groups who they think would have use for SASS documents, but may not be receiving them currently. These are SEA communications/public relations staff, the

director of teacher certification (many state certification offices are separate from the state department of education), governors' education aides, and education committees of state legislatures.

One way to ensure that the right people receive SASS publications would be to address the publications to positions rather than to people by name. This way, the appropriate type of person would receive the documents, regardless of staff turnover.

"There really is a lot of data out," one participant remarked, "but NCES does not let people know what's available. I think more people's needs would be met if they knew what NCES has." Participants agreed that NCES should provide more information about the SASS data it has available, but it must do so in a brief fashion. Several participants suggested SASS publish "more of the one pagers that set people on the path to bigger publications." These one-pagers should summarize data in publications or advertise recent publications and the types of data they contain.

Recommendations:

- Send SASS publications to SEA communications/public relations staff, directors of teacher certification, governors' aides, and staff of state legislators
- Address publications to positions rather than individuals
- Step up advertising efforts

In Summary

Before the close of the focus group meeting, each participant was asked to make his or her one top recommendation to NCES regarding the *SASS Statistical Profile* and *SASS by State*. These recommendations follow:

- Provide more detailed state information
- Provide more national breakdowns
- Provide more documentation of variables NCES used to create the data in the tables, telling users which surveys and items were used
- Provide more trend data
- Provide more tables with private school indicator breakdowns
- Break private schools into more subgroups
- Collect and publish data more often
- Put the numbers in Appendix B of the *SASS Statistical Profile* up front, then refer to the initial numbers in later tables

Conclusion

Since 1994, NCES has produced 133 documents pertaining to the Schools and Staffing Survey. These publications are of several types—descriptive reports, analytic reports, technical reports, issue briefs, and working papers. Each type of publication has its own purpose and is directed to its own audience. Accordingly, each publication reports on its subject matter with an appropriate amount of information and level of technicality.

State education agency representatives and other key customers who use SASS publications regard them highly. Most frequently, they use these publications to:

- Inform decision making
- Supply data to state officials, the legislature, and media
- Respond to other requests for data
- Compare their state data with data from other states
- Use as a resource in their own research

Respondents' comments indicate the content of these publications is generally appropriate to their needs. However, when asked to suggest improvements that would make SASS publications even more appropriate to their needs, state education agency representatives and other key customers added a number of features. Their suggestions included:

- Making the original survey instruments available in an appendix or companion document and referring the findings in SASS publications to the instruments so users can see the original question
- Separating out middle school data from elementary and secondary data
- Producing summary documents with trend data
- Providing more detailed state information
- Allowing states to pay for the collection of additional data and oversampling

State education agency representatives and other key customers also expressed interest in obtaining more information on the following topics:

- Professional development
- Teachers' routes to the classroom
- Student assessment
- Standards
- Accountability systems
- School violence
- Salary comparisons
- Administrators' backgrounds and positions
- Student enrollments and teacher supply and demand projections
- Dropout rates

Customers were overwhelmingly positive about the format of SASS publications, saying the format met their needs "well." The text and the tables, they indicated, were easy to understand and well laid out. Most customers, however, turn to the tables far more often than they do the text. Nonetheless, they want NCES to continue presenting the data in both formats, to help those individuals who "are not numbers people" and because they often find the highlights and summaries useful in picking out key points.

Customers' suggestions for improving the usability of SASS publications centered on:

- Providing more national breakdowns
- Providing more tables with private school indicator breakdowns
- Making adjustments in the placement of some of the tables
- Explaining definitions in more detail, coordinating definitions across all NCES surveys, and creating a key word cross-referencing system across all NCES publications
- Providing more informative table of contents information
- Highlighting key descriptors in the SASS charts to simplify locating data
- Including more totals and subtotals in tables
- Increasing reproducibility of tables, graphs, and maps

If there was an issue of major concern to the state education agency representatives and other key customers interviewed, it was the timeliness and periodicity of SASS data publications. The long period between the administration of SASS and reporting out of data is a major impediment to greater use of its publications, as is the long time period between the administrations themselves. This appears especially to be the case in state education agencies, which often turn to other, more recent data instead of SASS to fulfill their needs.

Respondents suggested a number of ways that NCES could speed up the dissemination of SASS data, including:

- Publishing "first glance" estimates
- Prioritizing the most useful data and publishing that first
- Publishing data tables first, then producing the full document
- Expediting data collection by using technology
- Releasing data electronically through NCES' home page
- Conducting interim surveys on single topics, i.e., weapons/violence in schools

It is important to note, however, that the SASS customers interviewed and those who participated in the focus group made it clear that they did not want NCES to sacrifice the high quality customers had come to expect of SASS data and data presentation for the sake of getting the results out sooner.

Most state education agency representatives and other key customers interviewed indicated they received SASS publications in the mail and so they assumed they were on a SASS mailing list. Many respondents also picked up SASS publications at meetings they attended.

In light of these positive comments regarding SASS publications, the question about why only 30 out of 50 states were able to identify a SASS user for interview purposes remains. Information from both telephone survey respondents and focus group members may provide a clue. These individuals suggested that NCES could significantly increase the number of SASS users by stepping up its advertising of SASS. While state education agency representatives and other key customers praised their access to SASS publications when they knew about them, they also emphasized that much of the data go unused because they and other people do not know the data are there. This indicates that additional state education agency personnel may very well serve as a ready audience should NCES choose to expand its marketing strategy for SASS publications.

To close, SASS customers who participated in this publications review clearly found SASS publications a trustworthy source of useful information. Even given the time lag between data collection, its release, and the next data collection, SASS retains a strong following both among state education agency representatives and other key customers. The reason is that SASS presents appropriate, high quality data in fashion that is understandable and usable, and easily accessible.

Appendix
Printing and Distribution of Twenty Recent SASS Publications

Publication Title	NCES pub. no.	Printing		Distribution					
		Announcements	Publications	Within ED	Mailed to indivs./ orgs.	To NLE/ NEDRC	To author	To storage	GPO sales
Descriptive Reports									
Public School Districts in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1987-88 to 1993-94	98-203	2,519	7,186	186	750	5,200	300	750	NA*
Private School Universe Survey, 1995-96	98-229	2,318	1,634	222	762	150	250	250	NA
Characteristics of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers: Results from the Teacher Followup Survey, 1994-95	97-450	22,600	2,859	207	1,352	300	500	500	4
Public and Private School Principals in the United States: A Statistical Profile 1987-88 to 1993-95	97-455	93,790	3,286	195	1,441	350	200	1,100	1
Private Schools in the U.S.: A Statistical Profile, 1993-94	97-459	16,891	2,784	125	1,609	300	250	500	NA
Schools and Staffing in the U.S.: A Statistical Profile: 1993-94	96-124	5,032	3,612	188	2,224	400	300	500	59

Table reads: For the descriptive report "Public School Districts in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1987-88 to 1993-94", publications number 98-203, NCES printed 2,519 announcements and 7,186 copies of the publication, distributing 186 within the Department of Education, 750 to individuals and organizations outside the Department, 5,200 to the National Library of Education and the National Education Data Resource Center, 300 to the author, and 750 to storage. GPO sales figures were not available.

* Sales information not available

Appendix
Printing and Distribution of Twenty Recent SASS Publications

Publication Title	NCES pub. no.	Printing: Announcements	Printing: Publications	Distribution: Within ED	Distribution: Mailed to indivs./ orgs.	Distribution: To NLE/ NEDRC	Distribution: To author	Distribution: To storage	Distribution: GPO sales
Descriptive Reports (continued)									
SASS by State, 1993-94, Schools and Staffing Survey: Selected State Results	96-312	3,650	1,938	105	933	400	500	0	NA
Private Schools in the U.S.: A Statistical Profile, 1990-91	95-330	11,738	4,076	80	3,046	200	250	500	6
America's Teachers: Profile of a Profession	97-460	4,097	2,891	156	1,185	650	400	500	22
Analytic Reports									
Teacher Professionalization and Teacher Commitment: A Multi-Level Analysis	97-069	4,531	3,871	295	2,276	600	100	600	48
Time Spent Teaching Core Academic Subjects in Elementary School: Comparison Across Community, School, Teacher, and Student Characteristics	97-293	4,681	4,146	304	2,692	450	200	500	12
Job Satisfaction Among America's Teachers: Effects of Workplace Conditions, Background Characteristics, and Teacher Compensation, 1993-94	97-471	4,375	1,154	126	348	280	200	200	9
Out-of-field Teaching and Educational Equality	96-040	5,694	3,068	193	2,075	400	200	200	48

Appendix
Printing and Distribution of Twenty Recent SASS Publications

Publication Title	NCES pub. no.	Printing		Distribution					
		Announce-ments	Publications	Within ED	Mailed to indivs./ orgs.	To NLE/ NEDRC	To author	To storage	GPO sales
Technical Reports									
Measurement Error Studies at the National Center for Education Statistics	97-464	none	1,250	102	448	100	300	300	NFS*
An Analysis of Total Non-Response in the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey	98-243	13,466	1,146	96	600	250	200	250	NA
1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey: Sample Design and Estimation	96-089	none	1,283	139	444	200	200	300	NFS
An Exploratory Analysis of Non-respondents in the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey	96-338	16,932	1,281	45	436	400	200	200	9
Issue Briefs									
Schools Serving Family Needs: Extended-Day Programs in Public and Private Schools	97-490	none	4,012	296	2,316	400	1,000	0	NFS
Credentials and Tests in Teacher Hiring: What Do Districts Require?	97-592	none	4,012	296	2,316	400	1,000	0	NFS
Public School Choice Programs, 1993-94: Availability and Student Participation	97-909	none	4,371	295	2,676	400	1,000	0	NFS

* Not for sale

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date

Please contact Angela Miles at (202) 219-1761 (angela_miles@ed.gov)
if you are interested in any of the following papers

Number	Title	Contact
94-01 (July)	Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Papers Presented at Meetings of the American Statistical Association	Dan Kasprzyk
94-02 (July)	Generalized Variance Estimate for Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)	Dan Kasprzyk
94-03 (July)	1991 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Reinterview Response Variance Report	Dan Kasprzyk
94-04 (July)	The Accuracy of Teachers' Self-reports on their Postsecondary Education: Teacher Transcript Study, Schools and Staffing Survey	Dan Kasprzyk
94-05 (July)	Cost-of-Education Differentials Across the States	William Fowler
94-06 (July)	Six Papers on Teachers from the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey and Other Related Surveys	Dan Kasprzyk
94-07 (Nov.)	Data Comparability and Public Policy: New Interest in Public Library Data Papers Presented at Meetings of the American Statistical Association	Carrol Kindel
95-01 (Jan.)	Schools and Staffing Survey: 1994 Papers Presented at the 1994 Meeting of the American Statistical Association	Dan Kasprzyk
95-02 (Jan.)	QED Estimates of the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey: Deriving and Comparing QED School Estimates with CCD Estimates	Dan Kasprzyk
95-03 (Jan.)	Schools and Staffing Survey: 1990-91 SASS Cross-Questionnaire Analysis	Dan Kasprzyk
95-04 (Jan.)	National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: Second Follow-up Questionnaire Content Areas and Research Issues	Jeffrey Owings
95-05 (Jan.)	National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: Conducting Trend Analyses of NLS-72, HS&B, and NELS:88 Seniors	Jeffrey Owings

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
95-06 (Jan.)	National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: Conducting Cross-Cohort Comparisons Using HS&B, NAEP, and NELS:88 Academic Transcript Data	Jeffrey Owings
95-07 (Jan.)	National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: Conducting Trend Analyses HS&B and NELS:88 Sophomore Cohort Dropouts	Jeffrey Owings
95-08 (Feb.)	CCD Adjustment to the 1990-91 SASS: A Comparison of Estimates	Dan Kasprzyk
95-09 (Feb.)	The Results of the 1993 Teacher List Validation Study (TLVS)	Dan Kasprzyk
95-10 (Feb.)	The Results of the 1991-92 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) Reinterview and Extensive Reconciliation	Dan Kasprzyk
95-11 (Mar.)	Measuring Instruction, Curriculum Content, and Instructional Resources: The Status of Recent Work	Sharon Bobbitt & John Ralph
95-12 (Mar.)	Rural Education Data User's Guide	Samuel Peng
95-13 (Mar.)	Assessing Students with Disabilities and Limited English Proficiency	James Houser
95-14 (Mar.)	Empirical Evaluation of Social, Psychological, & Educational Construct Variables Used in NCES Surveys	Samuel Peng
95-15 (Apr.)	Classroom Instructional Processes: A Review of Existing Measurement Approaches and Their Applicability for the Teacher Follow-up Survey	Sharon Bobbitt
95-16 (Apr.)	Intersurvey Consistency in NCES Private School Surveys	Steven Kaufman
95-17 (May)	Estimates of Expenditures for Private K-12 Schools	Stephen Broughman
95-18 (Nov.)	An Agenda for Research on Teachers and Schools: Revisiting NCES' Schools and Staffing Survey	Dan Kasprzyk
96-01 (Jan.)	Methodological Issues in the Study of Teachers' Careers: Critical Features of a Truly Longitudinal Study	Dan Kasprzyk

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
96-02 (Feb.)	Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS): 1995 Selected papers presented at the 1995 Meeting of the American Statistical Association	Dan Kasprzyk
96-03 (Feb.)	National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) Research Framework and Issues	Jeffrey Owings
96-04 (Feb.)	Census Mapping Project/School District Data Book	Tai Phan
96-05 (Feb.)	Cognitive Research on the Teacher Listing Form for the Schools and Staffing Survey	Dan Kasprzyk
96-06 (Mar.)	The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for 1998-99: Design Recommendations to Inform Broad Education Policy	Dan Kasprzyk
96-07 (Mar.)	Should SASS Measure Instructional Processes and Teacher Effectiveness?	Dan Kasprzyk
96-08 (Apr.)	How Accurate are Teacher Judgments of Students' Academic Performance?	Jerry West
96-09 (Apr.)	Making Data Relevant for Policy Discussions: Redesigning the School Administrator Questionnaire for the 1998-99 SASS	Dan Kasprzyk
96-10 (Apr.)	1998-99 Schools and Staffing Survey: Issues Related to Survey Depth	Dan Kasprzyk
96-11 (June)	Towards an Organizational Database on America's Schools: A Proposal for the Future of SASS, with comments on School Reform, Governance, and Finance	Dan Kasprzyk
96-12 (June)	Predictors of Retention, Transfer, and Attrition of Special and General Education Teachers: Data from the 1989 Teacher Followup Survey	Dan Kasprzyk
96-13 (June)	Estimation of Response Bias in the NHES:95 Adult Education Survey	Steven Kaufman
96-14 (June)	The 1995 National Household Education Survey: Reinterview Results for the Adult Education Component	Steven Kaufman

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
96-15 (June)	Nested Structures: District-Level Data in the Schools and Staffing Survey	Dan Kasprzyk
96-16 (June)	Strategies for Collecting Finance Data from Private Schools	Stephen Broughman
96-17 (July)	National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 1996 Field Test Methodology Report	Andrew G. Malizio
96-18 (Aug.)	Assessment of Social Competence, Adaptive Behaviors, and Approaches to Learning with Young Children	Jerry West
96-19 (Oct.)	Assessment and Analysis of School-Level Expenditures	William Fowler
96-20 (Oct.)	1991 National Household Education Survey (NHES:91) Questionnaires: Screener, Early Childhood Education, and Adult Education	Kathryn Chandler
96-21 (Oct.)	1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES:93) Questionnaires: Screener, School Readiness, and School Safety and Discipline	Kathryn Chandler
96-22 (Oct.)	1995 National Household Education Survey (NHES:95) Questionnaires: Screener, Early Childhood Program Participation, and Adult Education	Kathryn Chandler
96-23 (Oct.)	Linking Student Data to SASS: Why, When, How	Dan Kasprzyk
96-24 (Oct.)	National Assessments of Teacher Quality	Dan Kasprzyk
96-25 (Oct.)	Measures of Inservice Professional Development: Suggested Items for the 1998-1999 Schools and Staffing Survey	Dan Kasprzyk
96-26 (Nov.)	Improving the Coverage of Private Elementary-Secondary Schools	Steven Kaufman
96-27 (Nov.)	Intersurvey Consistency in NCES Private School Surveys for 1993-94	Steven Kaufman

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
96-28 (Nov.)	Student Learning, Teaching Quality, and Professional Development: Theoretical Linkages, Current Measurement, and Recommendations for Future Data Collection	Mary Rollefson
96-29 (Nov.)	Undercoverage Bias in Estimates of Characteristics of Adults and 0- to 2-Year-Olds in the 1995 National Household Education Survey (NHES:95)	Kathryn Chandler
96-30 (Dec.)	Comparison of Estimates from the 1995 National Household Education Survey (NHES:95)	Kathryn Chandler
97-01 (Feb.)	Selected Papers on Education Surveys: Papers Presented at the 1996 Meeting of the American Statistical Association	Dan Kasprzyk
97-02 (Feb.)	Telephone Coverage Bias and Recorded Interviews in the 1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES:93)	Kathryn Chandler
97-03 (Feb.)	1991 and 1995 National Household Education Survey Questionnaires: NHES:91 Screener, NHES:91 Adult Education, NHES:95 Basic Screener, and NHES:95 Adult Education	Kathryn Chandler
97-04 (Feb.)	Design, Data Collection, Monitoring, Interview Administration Time, and Data Editing in the 1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES:93)	Kathryn Chandler
97-05 (Feb.)	Unit and Item Response, Weighting, and Imputation Procedures in the 1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES:93)	Kathryn Chandler
97-06 (Feb.)	Unit and Item Response, Weighting, and Imputation Procedures in the 1995 National Household Education Survey (NHES:95)	Kathryn Chandler
97-07 (Mar.)	The Determinants of Per-Pupil Expenditures in Private Elementary and Secondary Schools: An Exploratory Analysis	Stephen Broughman
97-08 (Mar.)	Design, Data Collection, Interview Timing, and Data Editing in the 1995 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
97-09 (Apr.)	Status of Data on Crime and Violence in Schools: Final Report	Lee Hoffman
97-10 (Apr.)	Report of Cognitive Research on the Public and Private School Teacher Questionnaires for the Schools and Staffing Survey 1993-94 School Year	Dan Kasprzyk
97-11 (Apr.)	International Comparisons of Inservice Professional Development	Dan Kasprzyk
97-12 (Apr.)	Measuring School Reform: Recommendations for Future SASS Data Collection	Mary Rollefson
97-13 (Apr.)	Improving Data Quality in NCES: Database-to-Report Process	Susan Ahmed
97-14 (Apr.)	Optimal Choice of Periodicities for the Schools and Staffing Survey: Modeling and Analysis	Steven Kaufman
97-15 (May)	Customer Service Survey: Common Core of Data Coordinators	Lee Hoffman
97-16 (May)	International Education Expenditure Comparability Study: Final Report, Volume I	Shelley Burns
97-17 (May)	International Education Expenditure Comparability Study: Final Report, Volume II, Quantitative Analysis of Expenditure Comparability	Shelley Burns
97-18 (June)	Improving the Mail Return Rates of SASS Surveys: A Review of the Literature	Steven Kaufman
97-19 (June)	National Household Education Survey of 1995: Adult Education Course Coding Manual	Peter Stowe
97-20 (June)	National Household Education Survey of 1995: Adult Education Course Code Merge Files User's Guide	Peter Stowe
97-21 (June)	Statistics for Policymakers or Everything You Wanted to Know About Statistics But Thought You Could Never Understand	Susan Ahmed
97-22 (July)	Collection of Private School Finance Data: Development of a Questionnaire	Stephen Broughman

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
97-23 (July)	Further Cognitive Research on the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Teacher Listing Form	Dan Kasprzyk
97-24 (Aug.)	Formulating a Design for the ECLS: A Review of Longitudinal Studies	Jerry West
97-25 (Aug.)	1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96) Questionnaires: Screener/Household and Library, Parent and Family Involvement in Education and Civic Involvement, Youth Civic Involvement, and Adult Civic Involvement	Kathryn Chandler
97-26 (Oct.)	Strategies for Improving Accuracy of Postsecondary Faculty Lists	Linda Zimbler
97-27 (Oct.)	Pilot Test of IPEDS Finance Survey	Peter Stowe
97-28 (Oct.)	Comparison of Estimates in the 1996 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler
97-29 (Oct.)	Can State Assessment Data be Used to Reduce State NAEP Sample Sizes?	Steven Gorman
97-30 (Oct.)	ACT's NAEP Redesign Project: Assessment Design is the Key to Useful and Stable Assessment Results	Steven Gorman
97-31 (Oct.)	NAEP Reconfigured: An Integrated Redesign of the National Assessment of Educational Progress	Steven Gorman
97-32 (Oct.)	Innovative Solutions to Intractable Large Scale Assessment (Problem 2: Background Questionnaires)	Steven Gorman
97-33 (Oct.)	Adult Literacy: An International Perspective	Marilyn Binkley
97-34 (Oct.)	Comparison of Estimates from the 1993 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler
97-35 (Oct.)	Design, Data Collection, Interview Administration Time, and Data Editing in the 1996 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler
97-36 (Oct.)	Measuring the Quality of Program Environments in Head Start and Other Early Childhood Programs: A Review and Recommendations for Future Research	Jerry West

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
97-37 (Nov.)	Optimal Rating Procedures and Methodology for NAEP Open-ended Items	Steven Gorman
97-38 (Nov.)	Reinterview Results for the Parent and Youth Components of the 1996 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler
97-39 (Nov.)	Undercoverage Bias in Estimates of Characteristics of Households and Adults in the 1996 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler
97-40 (Nov.)	Unit and Item Response Rates, Weighting, and Imputation Procedures in the 1996 National Household Education Survey	Kathryn Chandler
97-41 (Dec.)	Selected Papers on the Schools and Staffing Survey: Papers Presented at the 1997 Meeting of the American Statistical Association	Steve Kaufman
97-42 (Jan. 1998)	Improving the Measurement of Staffing Resources at the School Level: The Development of Recommendations for NCES for the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)	Mary Rollefson
97-43 (Dec.)	Measuring Inflation in Public School Costs	William J. Fowler, Jr.
97-44 (Dec.)	Development of a SASS 1993-94 School-Level Student Achievement Subfile: Using State Assessments and State NAEP, Feasibility Study	Michael Ross
98-01 (Jan.)	Collection of Public School Expenditure Data: Development of a Questionnaire	Stephen Broughman
98-02 (Jan.)	Response Variance in the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey: A Reinterview Report	Steven Kaufman
98-03 (Feb.)	Adult Education in the 1990s: A Report on the 1991 National Household Education Survey	Peter Stowe
98-04 (Feb.)	Geographic Variations in Public Schools' Costs	William J. Fowler, Jr.

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

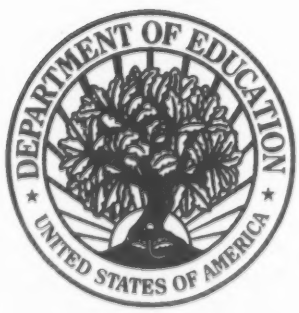
Number	Title	Contact
98-05 (Mar.)	SASS Documentation: 1993-94 SASS Student Sampling Problems; Solutions for Determining the Numerators for the SASS Private School (3B) Second-Stage Factors	Steven Kaufman
98-06 (May)	National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) Base Year through Second Follow-Up: Final Methodology Report	Ralph Lee
98-07 (May)	Decennial Census School District Project Planning Report	Tai Phan
98-08 (July)	The Redesign of the Schools and Staffing Survey for 1999-2000: A Position Paper	Dan Kasprzyk
98-09 (Aug.)	High School Curriculum Structure: Effects on Coursetaking and Achievement in Mathematics for High School Graduates—An Examination of Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988	Jeffrey Owings
98-10 (Aug.)	Adult Education Participation Decisions and Barriers: Review of Conceptual Frameworks and Empirical Studies	Peter Stowe
98-11 (Aug.)	Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study First Follow-up (BPS:96-98) Field Test Report	Aurora D'Amico
98-12 (Oct.)	A Bootstrap Variance Estimator for Systematic PPS Sampling	Steven Kaufman
98-13 (Oct.)	Response Variance in the 1994-95 Teacher Follow-up Survey	Steven Kaufman
98-14 (Oct.)	Variance Estimation of Imputed Survey Data	Steven Kaufman
98-15 (Oct.)	Development of a Prototype System for Accessing Linked NCES Data	Steven Kaufman
98-16 (Dec.)	A Feasibility Study of Longitudinal Design for Schools and Staffing Survey	Stephen Broughman
98-17 (Dec.)	Developing the National Assessment of Adult Literacy: Recommendations from Stakeholders	Sheida White

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
1999-01 (Jan.)	A Birth Cohort Study: Conceptual and Design Considerations and Rationale	Jerry West
1999-02 (Feb.)	Tracking Secondary Use of the Schools and Staffing Survey Data: Preliminary Results	Dan Kasprzyk
1999-03 (Feb.)	Evaluation of the 1996-97 Nonfiscal Common Core of Data Surveys Data Collection, Processing, and Editing Cycle	Beth Young
1999-04 (Feb.)	Measuring Teacher Qualifications	Dan Kasprzyk
1999-05 (Mar.)	Procedures Guide for Transcript Studies	Dawn Nelson
1999-06 (Mar.)	1998 Revision of the Secondary School Taxonomy	Dawn Nelson
1999-07 (Apr.)	Collection of Resource and Expenditure Data on the Schools and Staffing Survey	Stephen Broughman
1999-08 (May)	Measuring Classroom Instructional Processes: Using Survey and Case Study Fieldtest Results to Improve Item Construction	Dan Kasprzyk
1999-09a (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: An Overview	Alex Sedlacek
1999-09b (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: Sample Design	Alex Sedlacek
1999-09c (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: Weighting and Population Estimates	Alex Sedlacek
1999-09d (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: Development of the Survey Instruments	Alex Sedlacek
1999-09e (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: Scaling and Proficiency Estimates	Alex Sedlacek
1999-09f (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: Interpreting the Adult Literacy Scales and Literacy Levels	Alex Sedlacek
1999-09g (May)	1992 National Adult Literacy Survey: Literacy Levels and the Response Probability Convention	Alex Sedlacek

Listing of NCES Working Papers to Date--Continued

Number	Title	Contact
1999-10 (May)	What Users Say About Schools and Staffing Survey Publications	Dan Kasprzyk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